

2.13 Deputy R.G. Le Hérissier of St. Saviour of the Minister for Transport and Technical Services regarding process for the modification of route structure of scheduled bus service:

Is the Minister satisfied with the process currently used to determine whether to modify the route structure of scheduled bus services?

Deputy G.W.J. de Faye (The Minister for Transport and Technical Services):

No, Sir, I am not. This Minister is very rarely satisfied, and Deputy Le Hérissier can sit down with my Chief Officer and senior officers at any time of his choosing, and they will tell him exactly the same. I am constantly striving to improve methods, and how we regulate the buses is one of them. However, what I can say to give some assurance to Members who may now be having a rather gloomy turn of mind at this response is that the way we do things now is infinitely preferable to the way things used to happen before. One of the advantages of the new Connex operation as a service operator relationship is that we have open book policies. I, of course, know precisely what the fares are, because the fares are paid directly to the States via the department and, indeed, we have a much clearer idea - a better idea than ever before in the Island's history - about how our public transport service operations work. So, in general terms, I am pleased with the levels of information that I get. It gives the department a much better oversight of the efficiency of operations, but that is not good enough for me, through the Chair, Deputy, I strive to achieve higher and better results, and year by year, we are getting them.

2.13.1 Deputy R.G. Le Hérissier:

Notwithstanding the excellent services the Minister has introduced and for which we are eternally grateful, would the Minister not acknowledge that there is still a somewhat confused and irrational system? Does he, for example, Sir, sit down at a point in the year with a budget and say: "This route is not making money, I will therefore shift resources elsewhere"? In other words, there is a holistic approach taken - is that how it is done - or does he wake up in the middle of the night and just sort of say: "There are too many people on this route, I must stop"?

Deputy G.W.J. de Faye:

Well, I do both and, regrettably, I do perhaps a little too much waking up in the night with sheer concern and worry about how the efficiency of the public service operation is being carried out. But in reference to the other technique, which is a favoured one, I am about to sit down with my officers to prepare ourselves for the new winter schedules to consider whether K route operations should be continued or discontinued, to look in detail, in fact at the same time, at the efficiency of the school services, which also should come under scrutiny. They are subsidised at twice the level of the main scheduled network at £2 per student per trip. It is an expensive operation; one I intend to look at closely, and I will be taking advantage of the summer break, when I will not be getting one, to look at both [**Members: Oh!**] - thank you for your sympathy - when I will be taking the opportunity to look at all the services. We now have, thanks to the details that were given to us by the Wayfarer computerised fare operations, a much, much clearer picture what routes are performing and which are not.

2.13.2 Deputy J.A. Martin:

Yes, as I did not get an answer of the Housing Minister - and I am sorry if this might add to his very, very long workload - could I get an assurance that the Transport Minister will look at the route that goes now to Le Squez - the 18 - every 20 minutes? Could it not be extended up to Clos de Roncier, maybe making it a 30 minute run? But it is a 6 day a week bus service and could he add that to his list with urgency? Even if these houses are sold, I am told, and this House has been told this morning, we have many people stranded up in this area without any transport.

Deputy G.W.J. de Faye:

I would like to refer the Deputy to the bus timetable for the Summer 2007 period, which displays not only the main schedule summer network, but also the new integrated Island Explorer network and she will see that the new Explorer Green service goes very close to the area she is talking about and, indeed, it is very heavily used and is the highest frequency of Explorer services. I regret - and it is a matter of regret - that I simply do not currently have sufficient funds to seriously extend services across the Island into the evening. I would dearly like to and, indeed, have conducted experiments that were well publicised in the past to see if we could achieve this. Frankly, it is just not going to happen because there is no more money available in the budget, and the only other serious way that I could probably get money is from an environmental tax and that in itself is looking fairly unlikely in the short-term. So while I am very sympathetic to the Deputy's view, at this stage I simply do not have the available cash.

2.13.3 Deputy C.J. Scott Warren of St. Saviour:

I think the Minister has probably answered that he does not know, because I was going to ask the Minister when he believed he would be able to plug the public perceived gaps for the scheduled bus service. I appreciate it is linked to money, and I just wondered - obviously an environmental tax has been mentioned - does he have any idea of whether we are talking about 2, 3 or 5 years' time?

Deputy G.W.J. de Faye:

Well, frankly speaking, Sir, and this is primarily the experience of my very good colleague the Minister for Planning and Environment who mooted the idea of a tax link to power exhaust emissions. The idea of environmental taxes so far does not appear to have played very well or, as it were, struck a chord with the public. So it seems that we have some way to go, firstly to convince the public that environmental taxes are necessarily a good idea and, secondly, to establish precisely how those extra revenues might operate. This leaves me with a difficulty in that the only way I can now improve services perhaps in directions that it ought to go in, is by putting constraints on existing levels of service elsewhere in the system. That is something I am going to be looking at over the summer period to see, with the entire fleet at my disposal - which includes the school buses - how this might be reorchestrated in order to increase commuter provision at peak times and also to see to what extent we can improve evening services and, indeed, Sunday services, which are also currently, in my view, dismal.

The Bailiff:

One last concise question and answer, please, Deputy Le Hérissier. **[Laughter]**

2.13.4 Deputy R.G. Le Hérissier:

Could the Minister assure us when he is engaged in this re-evaluation during his one day off in the summer, will he be consulting the public? Will there be a public call for evidence?

Deputy G.W.J. de Faye:

The answer is, bluntly, not necessarily. If I am introducing experimental routes to see how things may or may not work, and we have tested evening routes, we have tested circular routes and, indeed, the current summer Explorer service is a result of successful experiments, there is no requirement on me to consult the public. However, if I am to make permanent changes in the schedules, and I want to issue this comment as an assurance to Members, I am required by law to consult the public. So, I regret, it is 2 answers to the Deputy, Sir: one is yes, I have to, and the other is: not necessarily.